

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 972

SP 038 558

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TITLE Focus on Teacher Salaries.
INSTITUTION Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA.
PUB DATE 1998-10-00
NOTE 5p.
AVAILABLE FROM Southern Regional Education Board, 592 10th Street, NW,
Atlanta, GA 30318; Tel: 404-875-9211; Web site: www.sreb.org
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education;
*Teacher Salaries; Teachers
IDENTIFIERS Cost of Living; Southern Regional Education Board

ABSTRACT

This report presents teacher salary data from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). There is a gap between SREB states' average teacher salaries and the national average. Over the last 5 years, SREB teacher salaries increased by an average of 14.4 percent; the national increase was nearly 2 percentage points lower. Georgia and North Carolina are working to reach the national average teacher salary, but Georgia may fall short this year. Lawmakers provided 6 percent on the state minimum salary schedule for 1998-99, but the percentage of actual raises will be somewhat lower unless local districts give raises on salaries paid above the minimum schedule. North Carolina's pay increases are tied to 1997 reform legislation designed to attract and retain excellent teachers. Louisiana continues working to raise salary averages to the southeastern average, with larger raises going to teachers in low-wealth districts. Increases of 2-3 percent are estimated in Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Teachers in West Virginia will receive \$756. Estimates are not available for the other SREB states. When comparing salaries of southern teachers with those in other parts of the nation, cost of living does not make much difference. When looking at actual salaries, only Delaware and Maryland exceed the national average. With cost of living factored in, Delaware and Maryland are the only SREB states in the top third nationally.

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FOCUS on Teacher Salaries

SREB

Gale F. Gaines

SREB states have been chipping away at the gap between the region's average teacher salary and the national average and may have closed the gap even further in 1997-98. The regional average is estimated at \$34,243 for 1997-98, compared with the national average of \$39,385. According to these newly-released estimates, the average increase for SREB states was greater than the national increase — 2.6 percent, compared with 2.2 percent — since 1996-97.

Over the last five years, teacher salaries in the region increased by an average of 14.4 percent; the national increase was nearly two percentage points lower. As a result, the average salary for the region moved from 85.4 percent of the national average in 1993 to nearly 87 percent in 1998. (In recent years, the regional average salary came closest to the national average in 1986, when the SREB average of \$22,617 was 89.7 percent of the \$25,206 national figure.)

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October 1998

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Legislative Actions

Where information is available, estimated state-by-state pay raises for 1998-99 range from 2 percent to 8.5 percent (in Alabama). Georgia and North Carolina continue to work toward their goals to reach the national average teacher salary, but Georgia likely will fall a bit short of its goal this year. Based on the 1997-98 estimates, Georgia's average salary of \$37,378 was nearly 95 percent of the national average. Lawmakers provided 6 percent on the state minimum-salary schedule for 1998-99, but the percentage of actual raises will be somewhat lower unless local districts give raises on salaries paid above the minimum schedule. Also, the national average is likely to increase by several percent for 1998-99; Georgia would have to make up for that increase, too, in order to reach its goal this year.

North Carolina's aim is to reach the national average in 2000-01. Pay increases are tied to 1997 reform legislation designed to attract and retain excellent teachers. The plan involves raising the state minimum-salary schedule, rewarding teachers with more than 25 years of experience, increasing pay for teachers with a masters/advanced competency certificate or national certification, and providing incentive awards to teachers in schools that meet or exceed student achievement expectations. North Carolina's General Assembly is still in session but increases to the state minimum-salary schedule for 1998-99 will result in raises ranging from 4.4 percent to 11 percent, with 64 percent of teachers receiving pay hikes of 6 percent to 9 percent. Funding for other parts of the reform effort, such as for mentor teachers, will cause salaries to increase even more.

The Southern Regional Education Board Focus series will report on timely education issues.

Louisiana continues its effort to raise its salary average to the Southeastern average. Raises range from \$800 to \$1,500, with the larger ones going to teachers in low-wealth districts. While actual increases will vary, raises of 2 percent to 3 percent are estimated in Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Teachers in West Virginia will receive \$756. Estimates are not available at this time for pay raises in Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, Oklahoma and Texas.

Estimated Average Teacher Salaries in the SREB States, 1997-98 and Estimated Increases for 1998-99

	Estimated Average 1997-98	Estimated Change 1997 to 1998	Estimated Change 1993 to 1998	Estimated Percent Increase 1998 to 1999
United States	\$39,385	2.2%	12.5%	NA
SREB States	34,243	2.6	14.4	NA
SREB States as a Percent of US	86.9%			
Alabama	\$32,818	0.8%	21.8%	8.5%
Arkansas *	30,578	0.9	11.5	NA
Delaware	42,439	2.4	17.2	3%
Florida	34,475	1.7	10.6	NA
Georgia	37,378	5.0	24.4	6%
Kentucky *	34,525	2.2	11.0	2.3%
Louisiana *	29,650	2.2	13.6	\$800 to \$1,500
Maryland	41,739	1.4	7.7	NA
Mississippi	28,691	3.7	17.7	3%
North Carolina	33,315	6.9	13.6	4.4 to 11%
Oklahoma	30,606	0.8	18.1	NA
South Carolina	33,608	2.4	15.0	3%
Tennessee	35,340	3.3	22.0	2%
Texas	33,648	1.8	12.4	NA
Virginia	36,654	2.7	13.6	2.5%
West Virginia	33,398	0.4	10.2	\$756

NA Not Available

* Data estimated by the National Education Association

Sources: National Education Association, 1997-98 *Estimates of School Statistics*; Mississippi Department of Education.

Teacher Pay and Cost of Living

Many in the region continue to question the effect of cost of living on teacher salaries. Does cost of living make a difference when comparing the salaries of teachers in the South with those in other parts of the nation? Not as much as you might hope or expect. When looking at actual salaries in the region, only Delaware and Maryland exceed the national average salary and rank within the top one-third of states in the nation. Six SREB states (Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia) rank in the middle one-third and the remaining eight SREB states are in the lower third.

When cost of living is factored in, Delaware and Maryland again are the only SREB states in the top third nationally, but Georgia leads the 10 SREB states ranked in the middle third and is the only other state that exceeds the national average. Only four SREB states fall in the lower third of the nation (Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Oklahoma). States where cost of living has the greatest effect on salary rankings are Alabama, Arkansas and West Virginia. States where living expenses have little or no effect on rankings are Louisiana, Virginia and Florida. Maryland continues to be the only SREB state that drops in the national rankings when cost of living is considered

National Rankings of SREB States Adjusted for Cost of Living, 1996-97

Unadjusted		Adjusted for Cost of Living	
12	Delaware	9	Delaware
13	Maryland	17	Maryland
		18	Georgia
— National Average Salary —		— National Average Salary —	
23	Virginia	19	Tennessee
26	Georgia		
27	Tennessee	20	Kentucky
28	Florida	21	West Virginia
29	Kentucky	23	Virginia
32	West Virginia	26	Alabama
36	South Carolina	28	Florida
37	Alabama	29	Texas
38	Texas	30	South Carolina
43	North Carolina	34	Arkansas
44	Arkansas	38	Oklahoma
45	Oklahoma	40	North Carolina
48	Louisiana	45	Mississippi
50	Mississippi	47	Louisiana

Source: American Federation of Teachers, *Survey and Analysis of Salary Trends 1997*.

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